

Tribal
Survey Report
2008

Department of Health and Social Services
Office of Children's Services

Introduction

The Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services, works in partnership with Tribes and other community providers in the delivery of services to Alaska Native children. When there are concerns regarding the care and well-being of children, the Office of Children's Services strives to ensure that children are able to remain in their own homes through the provision of services to families. When children must reside in an out-of-home placement, the Office of Children's Services, as part of its statutory child protection mandate, has authority to assume legal and physical custody of children. The agency will initiate and coordinate out-of-home placement with the tribe. Relatives are the first consideration to provide care for children. The use of relative caregivers follows Indian Child Welfare Act guidelines in maintaining cultural continuity and family connections for children.

The agency makes active efforts to reunite children with their families. The Office of Children's Services works collaboratively with the family, Tribal groups, Guardians ad Litem, and foster parents to implement a plan for services that meets the needs of children and parents.

Tribal groups assist and support families with services throughout the state. This assistance and participation helps to monitor the needs and progress of children and families. Tribal groups are encouraged to advocate and work collaboratively with the Office of Children's Services in providing services that are supportive of Alaska Native families.

The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a survey to solicit information and comments regarding the efforts made by the agency to work with tribal groups. The survey made inquiries into active efforts by the Office of Children's Services, concurrent planning, and decision making for children and parents throughout the case. This information will be used to assist management in reviewing and improving programs within the Child Protective Services system.

Survey Methods

Tribal groups throughout the state were identified. There were 247 groups included in the survey. A survey instrument was developed which inquired about the tribal groups' experience in working with the Office of Children's Services. The survey was conducted by mail. An initial mailing and two follow-up mailings to non-respondents were conducted. The Tribal groups were assured that their responses would be combined with other respondents so that no individuals responding to the survey could be identified.

Survey Respondents

There were 163 completed surveys received from the mailing of 247 surveys for a response rate of 66%. Responses were received from each region of the state. The number of surveys sent and the number of responses by each region are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Responses by Region, Number, and Percent			
Region	Number of Surveys Sent	Number of Respondents	Percent of Response
Northern	87	64	74%
Southcentral	138	88	64%
Anchorage	5	2	40%
Southeast	17	9	53%
Total	247	163	66%

Findings

The findings of the survey have been tabulated and organized for presentation. The respondents' level of involvement in implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act is presented in Table 2. If the respondents were from a social service agency they were asked to give their position. This information is presented in table 3. The remainder of the report presents each item of inquiry from the survey with a table of the results. At the end of the report a summary of comments received from the participants is presented.

- **Please tell us which item(s) best describe your level of involvement in the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).**

Tribal groups were asked to check each aspect of the Indian Child Welfare Act that they were involved in. Several of the Tribal groups indicated more than one area of ICWA involvement, thus the number of responses will exceed the number of survey participants who chose to answer this question (158 participants). Survey participants were also provided an area to describe any other role they have in the implementation of ICWA. Other roles identified included prevention services, support services, and agency coordination. Table 2 presents the responses.

Table 2

Involvement of Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation by Number and Percent		
Tribal Respondents in ICWA Implementation	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Formal Intervention by Tribe	130	82%
Court Appearances	69	44%
Provide Direct Services	65	41%
Other Roles Indicated	30	19%

- **If you are employed in a social service agency, please tell us your title.**

Several of the respondents indicated they held more than one position within their agency. As a result, the number of positions reported exceeds the total number of those who responded to this survey question (158 respondents). The respondents were given an area to write in other positions they held. The positions described included Tribal Family Coordinator, Tribal Family Youth Specialist, Family Services Manager, and Child Protection Team. Table 3 presents the responses.

Table 3

Title of Position in Tribal Agency by Number and Percent		
Title of Position	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Social Services Director	14	9%
ICWA Worker	83	53%
Caseworker	7	4%
Administrative	13	8%
Other	26	16%
Not Employed in an Agency	40	25%

- **Collaboration between Tribal workers and the Office of Children's Services in the implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act has strengthened the quality of services for Alaska Native children.**

The Office of Children's Services works with tribal groups to ensure the provision of quality services to Alaska Native children. Tribes have resources and services that are available to Alaska Native families. The collaborative relationships between the Tribal groups, community providers, and the agency assure that families receive services that are matched to their specific needs. Table 4 presents the responses.

Table 4

Service Collaboration Has Improved the Quality of Services by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	19%	59%	16%	1%	5%
Southcentral	88	10%	63%	18%	6%	3%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	25%	38%	25%	12%	0%
Total	162	14%	60%	18%	4%	4%

- **When it is necessary for Alaska Native children to come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children's Services involves the tribes in relative searches.**

Tribal groups are a resource to the Office of Children's Services. One of the ways tribal groups assist the agency is with locating extended family members by providing names of relatives. This information enables the Office of Children's Services to identify relatives to provide care for children who are in need of temporary out-of-home placement. Table 5 presents the responses.

Table 5

Tribes are Involved in Relative Searches by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	23%	52%	16%	8%	1%
Southcentral	88	17%	59%	13%	3%	8%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	9	0%	78%	11%	0%	11%
Total	163	18%	58%	14%	5%	5%

- **When children come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children's Services involves the Tribes in decisions regarding placement of Alaska Native children.**

Tribal groups often are aware of family networks and extended families within their own communities. When Alaska Native children come into the custody of the state, the Office of Children's Services contacts the children's tribes to involve them in placement decisions. Table 6 presents the responses.

Table 6

Tribes are Involved in Placement Decisions for Alaska Native Children by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	20%	44%	16%	16%	4%
Southcentral	88	17%	59%	7%	10%	7%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	9	0%	56%	22%	22%	0%
Total	163	17%	53%	12%	13%	5%

- **In general, efforts are made to place children in ICWA preference settings.**

The Office of Children's Services and the children's Tribes work together to locate a home that meets ICWA requirements. This supports children's cultural continuity and allows children to remain connected to their family's traditions. Table 7 presents the responses.

Table 7

Efforts are Made to Place Children in ICWA Preference Settings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	17%	48%	19%	11%	5%
Southcentral	88	13%	59%	21%	3%	4%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	9	0%	56%	44%	0%	0%
Total	163	13%	55%	22%	6%	4%

- **Siblings are placed together whenever possible.**

When children come into the state's custody, the agency makes efforts to ensure siblings are placed together in foster care whenever possible. The agency involves the Tribe in identifying a home where siblings are able to stay together. Table 8 presents the responses.

Table 8

Siblings are Placed Together When Possible by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	17%	56%	20%	5%	2%
Southcentral	87	21%	47%	24%	2%	6%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	13%	75%	12%	0%	0%
Total	161	19%	52%	22%	3%	4%

- **The Tribe and Tribal designee receive timely notification for administrative reviews and other case related meetings.**

Tribal groups' involvement is important in the management of the case plan. Their input is valuable in ensuring appropriate services and activities are being provided to children and families in a timely manner. To support Tribal involvement, the Tribal groups must receive timely notices of scheduled meetings and reviews. Table 9 presents the responses.

Table 9

Tribes Received Timely Notice of Reviews and Meetings by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	62	15%	50%	19%	13%	3%
Southcentral	87	8%	44%	24%	16%	8%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	37%	13%	37%	13%
Total	159	10%	47%	21%	16%	6%

- **The administrative review process is helpful to parents to understand the changes and activities that need to occur and identify resources to assist them in the process.**

The Office of Children's Services works with Tribes and families to ensure that services are identified for the family. The agency reviews cases every six months to monitor the ongoing need for services and participation by the family. Tribal workers are invited to attend the six-month administrative review. Table 10 presents responses.

Table 10

The Administrative Review Process is Helpful to Parents by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	61	12%	57%	25%	5%	1%
Southcentral	86	6%	59%	21%	8%	6%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	38%	25%	37%	0%
Total	157	8%	57%	23%	8%	4%

- **Tribal groups are encouraged and supported to participate in initial case plan development and the monitoring of the family's progress.**

The Office of Children's Services invites Tribal groups to participate in the development of the initial case plan. They also help to support and monitor the family's progress throughout their involvement with OCS. Table 11 presents the responses.

Table 11

Tribal Groups Participated in Initial Case Decisions by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	62	19%	47%	19%	10%	5%
Southcentral	88	9%	49%	23%	11%	8%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	50%	13%	25%	12%
Total	160	13%	49%	21%	11%	6%

- **The Tribe is encouraged to participate in the decision-making for children and families throughout the different stages of the case.**

As families participate in services, there are decisions which need to be made regarding the ongoing case activities. Tribal groups are asked to participate in this process. Table 12 presents the responses.

Table 12

Tribal Groups Participate in Ongoing Case Decisions by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	62	16%	52%	24%	7%	1%
Southcentral	88	16%	42%	23%	13%	6%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	63%	12%	25%	0%
Total	160	15%	48%	23%	10%	4%

- **Concurrent planning is used effectively by the Office of Children's Services to provide permanency for children and their families.**

The concurrent goal is an alternate permanency goal that is identified for children who may not be able to be returned to their homes. The alternate goal works in conjunction with the primary goal of reunification. Table 13 presents the responses.

Table 13

Concurrent Planning is Used Effectively for Permanency by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	61	13%	51%	30%	3%	3%
Southcentral	88	4%	47%	30%	11%	8%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	75%	25%	0%	0%
Total	159	7%	50%	30%	7%	6%

- **Active efforts are used by the Office of Children's Services to reduce risk of harm to children.**

The Office of Children's Services conducts assessments to determine whether children can remain in their homes or must be removed while their parents address safety concerns. Based on the assessment and level of risk, the agency will offer active efforts through the provision of services that are matched to meet the specific needs of the family. The Tribal worker is involved, along with parents, in assessing the services that will aid in reducing the risk to the children. Active efforts are intended to strengthen families and reduce the risk of harm to children. Table 14 presents the responses.

Table 14

Active Efforts are Used to Reduce Risk of Harm to Children by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	62	18%	57%	18%	3%	4%
Southcentral	87	12%	49%	23%	9%	7%
Anchorage	2	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	50%	12%	38%	0%
Total	159	13%	53%	20%	8%	6%

- **The Office of Children's Services' work with Alaska Native families reflects understanding of the families' cultural traditions and values.**

The agency works collaboratively with Tribal workers in seeking appropriate services for Alaska Native families. A family's culture and values are recognized and respected through the agency's efforts to engage the family in needed services. Table 15 presents the responses.

Table 15

Work with Alaska Native Families Reflects Understanding of Cultural Values by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	62	16%	37%	25%	11%	11%
Southcentral	88	8%	39%	28%	15%	10%
Anchorage	2	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
Southeast	8	0%	63%	0%	12%	25%
Total	160	10%	39%	26%	14%	11%

- **Referral information is generally sent to your agency in a timely manner.**

Tribal groups have resources and services such as family style recovery camps, Alaska Native-centered counseling, medical services, and in-home family preservation. In order to ensure timely receipt of services, the Office of Children's Services sends referrals to the identified Tribal agencies. Table 16 presents the responses.

Table 16

Referral Information is Sent in a Timely Manner by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	55	9%	51%	22%	13%	5%
Southcentral	78	2%	42%	23%	21%	12%
Anchorage	1	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	7	0%	14%	29%	57%	0%
Total	141	5%	45%	23%	19%	8%

- **Referral information that is sent to your agency is sufficient to support case planning for the family.**

The Office of Children's Services shares information about the family's circumstances with tribal agencies through the referral process. The information provided to the agency is specific to the families' service needs to support the agency's assessment and case planning. Table 17 presents the responses.

Table 17

Referral Information Supports Case Planning by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	54	6%	57%	28%	7%	2%
Southcentral	78	3%	45%	30%	13%	9%
Anchorage	1	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	7	0%	28%	29%	43%	0%
Total	140	4%	49%	29%	12%	6%

- **In order to assess the family's progress, the workers at the Office of Children's Services maintain regular contact with Tribal providers.**

The workers at the Office of Children's Services maintain contact with service providers to receive progress reports on families. It is vital that there is collaboration with Tribal providers to ensure families are making progress on their case plans. Table 18 presents the responses.

Table 18

Regular Contact is Maintained with Tribal Providers by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	55	13%	44%	27%	13%	3%
Southcentral	79	7%	37%	30%	13%	13%
Anchorage	1	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	7	0%	43%	14%	43%	0%
Total	142	9%	40%	28%	14%	9%

- **In your experience, the Office of Children’s Services workers are prepared and knowledgeable of the cases and the families with whom they work.**

Effective case management for families requires that workers are knowledgeable of their cases and that they work collaboratively with the service provider. When workers are knowledgeable about their families, case planning with the family becomes more focused and enables the worker to accurately match services to families’ issues. Table 19 presents the responses.

Table 19

Workers are Prepared and Knowledgeable about Their Cases by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	11%	55%	23%	8%	3%
Southcentral	88	7%	51%	23%	12%	7%
Anchorage	2	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	9	0%	45%	33%	22%	0%
Total	163	8%	52%	24%	11%	5%

- **Overall, the Office of Children’s Services and your agency or group have a strong working relationship that is supportive of children and families in the community in which you work.**

Families need ongoing encouragement and support from the Office of Children’s Services, Tribal groups, and other community providers as the family engages in services. This support enables families to progress through the changes that are needed. Table 20 presents the responses.

Table 20

The Working Relationships between the Agencies are Stronger by Region, Level of Agreement, and Percent						
Region	Number of Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Northern	64	16%	56%	20%	3%	5%
Southcentral	88	9%	50%	23%	11%	7%
Anchorage	2	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%
Southeast	9	11%	56%	11%	22%	0%
Total	163	12%	52%	22%	9%	5%

Respondent Comments

An area was provided for respondents to provide a written response following the inquiry.

- **It is of continuing concern to the Office of Children's Services and to Tribal groups that Alaska Native children and their families are disproportionately represented in the child welfare population. Would you please comment and share suggestions for ways or alternatives to placing children in the foster care system?**

Several respondents noted the safety assessment process being used by the Office of Children's Services workers as a positive step in working with Alaska Native families on issues prior to children having to be removed from their homes. Many respondents indicated that their relationship with the Office of Children's Services is strong and that they are often included early in cases allowing them to assist in planning for the family. Other comments indicate that providing targeted services to children and parents to meet their identified needs early in a case before a removal of the children is considered is beneficial.

Respondents indicated a need for increased collaboration by the Office of Children's Services with Tribal groups to identify potential relatives and other Tribal members that can be utilized as caregivers for children. There were also comments pertaining to the need for more Alaska Native foster parents in rural areas. Several respondents noted the barriers to licensing Alaska Native foster homes that include the requirement for background checks, the high cost of food and utilities in the villages, and the availability of homes.

Additional Respondent Comments

An area was provided at the end of the survey for respondents to comment on any other area they felt would be helpful for the Office of Children's Services to know in their work with families.

- **Please comment on any other areas that would be helpful for us to know.**

Respondents expressed their pleasure in working with the Office of Children's Services. They commented that the Office of Children's Services has established effective working relationships with ICWA workers and Tribal groups. Several respondents commented that the working relationships they have with the Office of Children's Services have greatly improved in recent years. Several respondents indicated difficulty in telephone and e-mail communication with the Office of Children's Services' urban offices.

Respondents commented on the need for more training for case workers and ICWA workers. Suggestions for training included training on the Indian Child Welfare Act and cultural traditions and awareness. Respondents expressed the desire to have trainings together. There were some comments indicating that the Tribal partners need more information about case activities of families when referral information is sent to the tribe. Additional information requested included upcoming meetings and court hearings, notices of child placements, and information regarding the protective services reports for Alaska Native children.

Appreciation to Respondents

The response and thoughtful comments to this survey by our Tribal partners are deeply appreciated by the Office of Children's Services and will be incorporated by management and staff in our work to continue to improve our ability to assist families and children.